



Nfld. & Labrador

At least 26 civil cases of clergy abuse still open in N.L.



Lawyer says church leaders in no rush to settle, but new archbishop insists they are

CBC News · Posted: Feb 21, 2019 5:19 PM NT | Last Updated: February 21



More than two dozen civil lawsuits related to historical clergy abuse cases are still active in Newfoundland and Labrador. (Gerald Herbert/Associated Press)

Some of the cases sitting on Gregory Stack's desk have been ongoing for 20 years or more.

At the top of each lawsuit, the plaintiffs' identities are concealed under the pseudonym John Doe. Underneath, in bold letters, are the names of their abusers.

James Hickey. George Smith. Kevin Bennett. Raymond Lahey. Convicted sex offenders and Catholic priests throughout the decades in Newfoundland and Labrador.

"The church does not settle this willingly. It wants to fight them. It engages lawyers. It puts the victims through the wringer," said Stack, a lawyer who has settled more than 100 cases against the Catholic church and its priests.

"They drag it through, they hope it just gets buried in the dust eventually and people grow tired of hearing about it."



Gregory Stack is a senior partner at Stack and Associates in St. John's. (CBC)

These 18 active lawsuits were filed between 1997 and 2018, for historical offences of sexual abuse. The majority of cases against Hickey were settled in 1997, but Stack said more victims came forward over the years.

"It's natural that all victims don't come forward at the same time," he said. "It's a process of dealing with it internally, so different people can accept that it happened at various stages of their life."

Aside from Stack's cases, Geoff Budden told CBC News he has eight civil cases involving priests still open.

- [Pope warns Catholic leaders the faithful expect concrete action to end sexual abuse](#)
- [New St. John's archbishop says he's entering role with open ears](#)

Directive given to settle, says archbishop

Despite Stack's experience before the courts, archbishop Peter Hundt says the Archdiocese of St. John's is actively trying to settle all outstanding cases.

"There's a number of different reasons and it is tragic that it drags out," Hundt said. "But the legal things don't always work out as quickly or as smoothly as you'd like."



Peter Hundt, pictured here in 2013, is the new archbishop of the Archdiocese of St. John's.

Hundt took over the post from former archbishop Martin Currie in January. Hundt said Currie had given the church's legal team a directive to settle all cases.

The new archbishop says the church has taken steps outside the courtroom to make life easier for victims.

- [Gemma Hickey in Rome for clergy abuse summit](#)

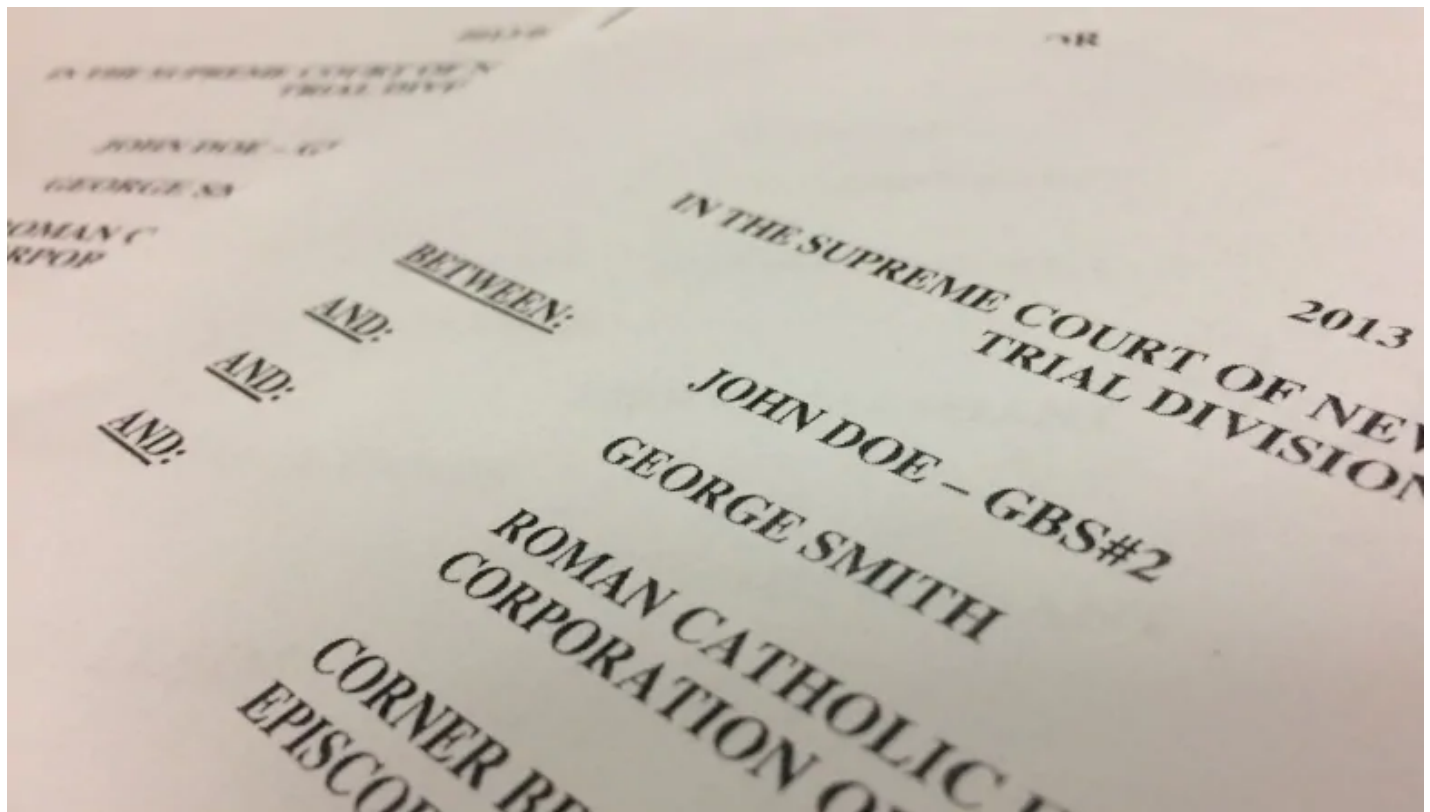
"I think you've got to make a distinction between the legal aspect and the pastoral aspect," Hundt said, pointing out that the archdiocese has offered counselling for victims and their families at the Ruah Centre in St. John's for the last 20 years.

"So from the point of view of the pastoral aspect, I don't think there's been a time delay at all."

What effect has it had on victims?

Stack said the lengthy cases take a toll on people, given all they've been through and what it often took for them to come forward.

His clients have had suicidal urges, he said, as well as problems with drugs and alcohol. Some ended up on the wrong side of the justice system.



Gregory Stack has 18 open lawsuits against various parts of the Catholic Church and former priests. (CBC)

"When they're abused as kids, they lose all respect for authority. They self-medicate. Frequently it's a life of crime, but we've got quite a few victims who put their lives together as best they can, but still they have relapses."

Some of them would have been content with just an apology, but they were never easy to come by, Stack said.

“In some ways, in a tragic sense, we've sort of sort of paved the way.”

- Archbishop Peter Hundt

"We've had to negotiate apologies from the church. What are they worth when you have to negotiate for one? Are they sincere? Doesn't seem so."

He's hopeful the papal summit on clergy abuse will deal not just with the future, but also with making amends with past victims and finding better ways to handle things.

- [**To tackle sexual abuse, Catholic Church must match words with concrete action: survivor**](#)

Hundt says the church need to be open and accepting of victims' claims and be transparent in the legal process.

He believes any lessons coming out of the summit will, unfortunately, perhaps be more obvious to people in Newfoundland and Labrador than anywhere else in the world.

"In some ways, in a tragic sense, we've sort of sort of paved the way for a lot of other dioceses because of the tragic experiences we've had here."

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With files from Peter Cowan